

Passing of the Universalist Church

Last Sunday's Utica Observer-Dispatch in noting the taking apart of the Universalist Church in Richfield Springs and the shipping of the Holy Communion table to the Universalist Church in Herkimer, marking the definite abandonment of the building as a Christian church, gives the following interesting history of the edifice and events connected therewith:

"It is interesting to know that this organ was made by John G. Marklove, an Englishman of Utica, at a cost of \$2,200, and was placed in the church about 1871, when the church was remodeled.

"The original structure was built in 1834, of stone, with four pillars in front, and a steeple in the center of the church, colonial in style. A tin dome surmounted the steeple and the bell rope hung outside. Stories are told of restless youngsters ringing this at intervals, much to the annoyance of the sexton.

"The bell was rung to assemble children to school and it also tolled for the passing souls. It is said that the sexton used to climb the belfry stairs and watch for the funeral procession on the horizon and when visible he would begin to sound his mournful summons.

"The basement of the church was used as a school which at least one resident, A. H. Elwood, remembers. He attended school there in 1853, the three Rs being taught by Miss Aurelia Hyde, a niece of Judge James Hyde. A debating society which lent much social and intellectual atmosphere to the small community also met in the basement. A drawing of the old church was made by Mr. Elwood about 1860 and undoubtedly is the only picture of it of any description in existence.

"A Bible was presented to the church in 1884 by George Robert Twelfth Hewes, who is remembered as a member of the Boston Tea Party, who was then 108 years old and who marched down the aisle and laid his precious book on the pulpit.

"Another story centers around the Civil War, when a sermon on "Abolition" was to be preached, but the bell was muffled by blankets, and gave out no sound when the sexton, Squire Palmer, went out to ring for the service.

"In order to attract more city guests to the services it was decided to remodel the church in 1870. This was no benefit architecturally but was done at an expense of about \$11,000. In place of one stately spire, two steeples of unusual design, Moorish in shape, were substituted, and the incongruity of placing a weathervane above a cross was accomplished, as the Christian symbol was placed on the shorter steeple.

[Richfield (Richfield Springs), Otsego Co.]

"New pews were installed, the organ brought from Utica and the society became a church by its dedication in 1871.

"A story is still told of a sailor, Stephen Burt, who climbed the original spires and sang to an admiring audience from his lofty pinnacle.

"The Rev. Samuel R. Ward held the longest pastorate and the last pastor was the Rev. Lewis H. Robinson, now of Albion, who preached from its pulpit from 1913 to 1916. Another pastor was the Rev. T. D. Cook, of Utica. It was during the pastorate of the Rev. Frank O. Hokerk that the organ was overhauled and improved, at an expense of \$1,000 of which half was given by Mrs. Andrew Carnegie and half by the church society."

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Transcribed on 20 Dec 2014 by Karen E. Dau of Rochester, NY